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New York

President: Mr. Eliasson ..... (Sweden)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 15

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/60/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/60/539)

Draft resolutions (A/60/L.28, A/60/L.29, A/60/L.30 and A/60/L.31)

The President: This morning, I had the honour to address the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I recalled the United Nations permanent responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine until the question is resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international law, as stated in resolution 59/31. Indeed, solidarity with the Palestinian people is an intrinsic part of our common responsibility to support the Middle East peace process.

It is in that context that the General Assembly, in the same resolution of last year, recalled the relevant Security Council resolutions and welcomed the affirmation by the Security Council of the vision of a region in which two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side within secure and recognized borders. That constitutes the foundation for the peace process.

Let me also use this occasion to express appreciation to all Governments, regional organizations, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and individuals for their untiring work and dedication to achieving lasting peace and security in the Middle East and to providing humanitarian and economic assistance to the Palestinian people.

We must spare no effort to assist both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to decades of Palestinian-Israeli confrontation and conflict.

I was particularly gratified to hear this morning the message of the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in which he stated that the Palestinian Authority has "chosen peace and negotiations as the path to reaching a just and comprehensive peace". And, he added, "our hands remain outstretched for peace".

This year has already marked some real progress. The Palestinian people demonstrated their commitment to democracy during the presidential election in January. The international community welcomed the Israeli withdrawal and dismantlement of settlements in the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank in the late summer. Last week, on 25 November, following an agreement by both sides on movement

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and access, the President of the Palestinian Authority formally reopened the Gaza Strip's border crossing with Egypt, thus giving the Palestinians control over one of their frontiers for the first time in their history. An important step was thus taken to fulfil the vision of a future Palestinian State.

All those who made that possible through painstaking and complicated negotiations, with persistence and tenacity of effort, are to be commended. The parties are encouraged to continue their cooperation on outstanding issues related to disengagement, supported by the international community.

The road map, supported by the Quartet, provides a solid basis for the continued work for peace. The international community must intensify its engagement in helping the parties to end a conflict which for far too long has tormented the region and its peoples. It is crucial that Palestinians and Israelis now cooperate to the fullest extent possible. Actions which could aggravate the situation and increase suspicions and mistrust must not be undertaken. Violence and acts of terror must cease.

In the meantime, everything must be done to alleviate the daily plight of the Palestinian people. Access and mobility are crucial for dealing with unemployment and poverty. International assistance should focus not only on humanitarian relief, but also on capacity-building programmes as part of a development strategy for a future Palestinian State.

Let us hope and let us be determined that, with the full backing of the United Nations and the world community, the peace process will be reactivated so that we can finally see the realization of the vision of a region in which two States, Israel and Palestine, face the future together in peace and cooperation.

I give the floor to Mr. Paul Badji of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, who will introduce draft resolutions A/60/L.28 to A/60/L.31 in the course of his statement.

Mr. Badji (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): In order to express their unswerving support for the Palestinian people in its quest for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, many representatives of Member States, observer States, intergovernmental organizations, agencies of the United Nations system and civil society organizations responded this morning to the invitation of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and participated in the solemn meeting that was held, as it is every year on 29 November, to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. As Chairman of the Committee, I thank them all for their keen interest, staunch support and active participation in the quest for a peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Before I introduce the four draft resolutions that have been submitted by the Committee under agenda item 37 of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly, I should like to make a few brief comments about the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and developments in the political process.

The past year has been marked by promise and hope, as well as by one development in the situation on the ground that has further complicated efforts to revive the political process for the implementation of the road map. The death more than a year ago of the national leader Yasser Arafat has posed a real challenge for the Palestinian people and its institutions. The transition was democratic and peaceful, and following free and fair elections, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas was elected President of the Palestinian Authority. With the assistance of the international community, and particularly that of Egypt, the first summit meeting to be held in a long time was convened in February 2004 in Sharm el-Sheikh between the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Ariel Sharon, and the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Abbas. The commitments undertaken by the two parties — especially with regard to the cessation of all acts of violence, the return to Palestinian Authority control of five Palestinian towns of the West Bank, and the release of a number of Palestinian prisoners — have created a new momentum conducive to the resumption of the political process.

In September, the Committee welcomed Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and from four settlements in the northern West Bank. The Committee deemed the withdrawal to be one of the most significant political developments of recent years in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and recognized the resolute efforts of the Palestinian Authority to coordinate the withdrawal with the Israeli side in order to ensure the smooth management of the new situation created thereby. That positive development was helpful in the resumption of security coordination between the

parties and gave rise to hope that could be exploited and built on to secure better cooperation between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

A very broad sector of international opinion held that the withdrawal from Gaza was a promising stage that could help to relaunch negotiations within the framework of the road map and advance the political process that had long been deadlocked. Committee members believe that the withdrawal from Gaza should be complete and irreversible, and enable the Palestinian Authority to exercise control over Gaza's borders, air and maritime spaces, and the transit points between that part of the territory and the rest of Palestine. They also deem it essential to obtain Israeli guarantees concerning the unimpeded circulation of persons and goods in and out of Gaza.

The building and use of a maritime port and an airport, as well as the establishment of a permanent geographic link to the West Bank, are absolutely crucial to Gaza's economy. It is precisely for those reasons that we welcomed the agreements concluded on 15 November between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on movement and access from and to Gaza. It is now crucial that those agreements be scrupulously and promptly implemented in order to give Palestinians and Israelis alike a sense of hope and progress following the positive developments of recent months.

Furthermore, the Committee remains profoundly concerned about the intensified expansion of settlement activity in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, and the accelerated construction of the illegal wall in the occupied Palestinian territory. Settlement activities have been accompanied by disturbing information concerning plans to establish permanent links between several West Bank settlements, particularly in East Jerusalem and its environs. All of that runs counter to Israel's obligations under the road map, which calls for a freeze in the building of settlements. Israel's policy and the facts that it has created on the ground are also violations of international law and of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Moreover, Israel's ongoing incursions into urban and rural Palestinian centres throughout the year, extrajudicial executions, demolition of homes, arrests and other actions, as well as the violent reprisals they have provoked — including four suicide bombings — jeopardize the hope for a speedy return to political dialogue. Those actions have also had a harmful effect on the positive momentum created by Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and the Sharm el-Sheikh agreements concluded between the Palestinian and Israeli sides early in the year.

At this critical juncture, on behalf of the Committee, I call on the Government of Israel to refrain from taking any action that might further destabilize the situation. Israel must, in particular, renounce its policy of developing settlements and halt the construction of the wall on the West Bank. It is to be hoped that Israel will facilitate the preparations for and holding of the forthcoming elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council scheduled for January 2006, in which the Palestinians of East Jerusalem must be able to participate fully. Furthermore, Israel must take steps to improve significantly the humanitarian situation of Palestinians by lifting curfews and reducing restrictions on the movement of people and goods.

The international community's readiness to help the parties in that complex process, leading to a resumption of direct negotiations, has been encouraging. The Committee welcomes the efforts of the Quartet and by each of its members to help the parties to move towards the implementation of the road map. The appointment of Mr. James Wolfensohn as the Quartet's Special Envoy was crucial to facilitating economic and logistic measures that are essential to improving the daily lives of the Palestinian population of Gaza. We recognize in particular the personal contribution of Mr. Wolfensohn to that task. International donors have pledged substantial financial contributions to improve the economic and social situation in Gaza following the Israeli withdrawal. The European Union is prepared to provide a third-party presence at the Rafah crossing.

Our Committee firmly believes that the United Nations should continue to exercise its permanent responsibility over the question of Palestine until it is effectively resolved in all of its aspects. Ultimately, only the implementation of United Nations resolutions — in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) — will guarantee a permanent solution consisting in the creation of two States and based on the 1967 borders and the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to independence and national sovereignty.

This month, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of its establishment by the General Assembly. Members of the Committee are aware that some Member States are questioning its raison d'être and that some are critical of its activities, which they deem to be imbalanced and partial. In that regard, allow me respectfully to remind those that offer such critiques that the Committee is the only intergovernmental body of the United Nations dealing solely with the political aspects of the question of Palestine. It was created by the General Assembly specifically to promote the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights in order to arrive at a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

Unfortunately, progress in that respect has been very slow, at best, notwithstanding certain positive developments. The situation on the ground remains most unstable and the occupation of Palestinian land continues, with all its repercussions. Thanks to its interaction with the main organs of the United Nations, in particular the Security Council and the General Assembly, thanks to its contacts with Member States and intergovernmental organizations, and thanks to the Secretariat's Division for Palestinian Rights and the assistance it provides through its programme of international meetings and conferences, its publications, its updating of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine — a unique and rich electronic resource containing thousands of United Nations documents on this issue — and its cooperation with civil society, the Committee believes that it is raising international public awareness of all aspects of the question of Palestine and promoting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Furthermore, as a concrete and practical means of support, since 1996 the Committee's programme of work has included an annual training programme for officials and professionals of the Palestinian Authority. Twenty young Palestinians, specializing in various fields, have acquired in-depth knowledge of the United Nations system and work undertaken on the question of Palestine. That very useful programme, organized by the Division for Palestinian Rights, has been frequently commended by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian Authority.

Since its establishment, the Committee has advocated for a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine, pursuant to the principles of international law. It welcomed the peace process launched in the Middle East in 1991 at the Madrid peace conference, and subsequently actively encouraged the parties' implementation of the Oslo Accords. It gave its full support to the road map initiated by the Quartet in order to realize the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders. At the same time, and pursuant to its mandate, the Committee continues to promote the full exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to mobilize international assistance on behalf of the Palestinian people and solidarity with it.

In that context, I should like to introduce to the General Assembly the four draft resolutions adopted by the Committee, the texts of which have been circulated under agenda item 37 in documents A/60/L.28, A/60/L.29, A/60/L.30 and A/60/L.31. The Lao People's Democratic Republic has joined the list of sponsors of draft resolution A/60/L.28 and Namibia is now a sponsor of all four draft resolutions.

The first three draft resolutions relate respectively to the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information. They reaffirm the important mandates entrusted by the General Assembly to that subsidiary body and those Secretariat structures. As it has in the past, the Committee intends to ensure that the resources made available to it are used effectively for all of its mandated tasks. The three draft resolutions have been duly updated.

The fourth draft resolution, entitled "Peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question", reiterates the General Assembly's position vis-à-vis the essential elements of such a settlement and refers to developments in the situation over the course of the past year. In particular, this year's draft stresses the need for the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings concluded between Israel and Palestine in February 2005 and to put an end to Israeli settlement activities in the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank.

The four draft resolutions that I have just introduced outline positions, mandates and programmes that are of special importance, particularly

at this critical stage. I appeal to members of the General Assembly to vote in favour of the draft resolutions and to support the important objectives contained therein.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Colin Scicluna, who will introduce the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on behalf of the Committee's Rapporteur.

Mr. Scicluna (Malta): It is an honour for me to present to the General Assembly, on behalf of the Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Ambassador Victor Camilleri, the annual report of the Committee, contained in document A/60/35.

In the course of the past year, the Committee has continued to carry out the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. The report I am about to present covers developments relating to the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the Committee since last year's report, through 5 October of this year.

The introduction of the report outlines the Committee's objectives and its general perspective of events that have taken place in the course of the year.

Chapters II and III summarize the General Assembly mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, and give an account of the organization of the Committee's work during the year.

Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine and the relevant political developments, as monitored by the Committee during the year. Reviewed here are various aspects of the situation on the ground, including the passing of the Palestinian Authority President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, in November 2004; the election of Mr. Mahmoud Abbas as Palestinian Authority President; Israeli actions in the occupied Palestinian territory, such as the recent disengagement from the Gaza Strip and four settlements in the northern West Bank; the expanding settlement activities; the implications of the ongoing construction of the wall in the West Bank and around East Jerusalem; the situation with respect to Palestinian prisoners; the humanitarian situation and the state of the Palestinian economy; the situation with respect to water resources available to the Palestinians; action by the United Nations system; and the continuing operational difficulties faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. In this Chapter, the Committee also states its position with regard to extrajudicial executions of Palestinians and terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians.

Chapter V reviews the action taken by the Committee. It is divided into two main sections. Section A describes action aimed at promoting Palestinian rights in the United Nations, including the General Assembly and the Security Council. This section makes reference to the communications addressed by the Chairman of the Committee to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council, and includes information on the participation by the Chairman at events organized by civil society in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Section B contains a detailed account of the implementation of the programme of work of the Committee and the Division. It provides information on the continued dialogue between the Committee and members of the European Union and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Sub-section 1 gives an account of the various international meetings and conferences organized in the course of the year.

This section also deals with the Committee's cooperation with intergovernmental organizations and civil society; research, monitoring and publications work of the Division; the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL); the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Chapter VI provides an overview of the work done over the year by the Department of Public Information in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 59/30 of 1 December 2004.

The last chapter of the report contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. In this Chapter, the Committee welcomes the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and four small settlements in the northern West Bank as a rare window of opportunity that should be used to revive negotiations within the framework of the road map and move the stalled political process forward. It expresses particular concern about the intention of the Israeli

Government to expand large settlement blocks in the West Bank, isolating East Jerusalem from the West Bank and separating the southern West Bank from its northern part. The Committee reiterates its position of principle that the settlements and the wall constructed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are contrary to international humanitarian law and numerous resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly adopted since 1967, as well as provisions of the road map.

The Committee states that it has been encouraged by renewed efforts of the international community to revitalize the road map, to facilitate the dialogue between the parties and to implement their commitments under the road map. The Committee affirms its intention to continue to promote support for the road map and the important work of the Quartet as the best way to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and other relevant resolutions, and the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights.

The Committee expresses its appreciation to Governments, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations entities and civil society for their involvement in its programmes of international meetings and conferences. It expresses its intention to address such issues as the need to end the occupation of all Palestinian land; support of the Palestinian Authority's efforts to rehabilitate the economy, especially that of the Gaza Strip; the responsibility of all Governments to apply international law to all aspects of the question of Palestine; the adverse consequences of the settlement policy and the construction of the wall for the achievement of a two-State solution.

The Committee further commends civil society organizations for their efforts to uphold international legitimacy with regard to the question of Palestine through advocacy and by mobilizing public opinion, as well as for their unremitting initiatives to provide relief and assistance to the Palestinian people.

The Committee stresses the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in support of the Committee's objectives and requests it to continue its programme of publications and other informational activities, including the further development of the UNISPAL documents collection. The Committee also notes the usefulness of the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority, in spite of the difficulties on the ground, and requests the Division to continue it.

The Committee expresses the view that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has made an important contribution to informing the media and public opinion on the relevant issues. The Committee requests the programme's continuation, with the necessary flexibility, as warranted by developments relevant to the question of Palestine.

Finally, wishing to make its contribution to the achievement of a just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and in view of the many difficulties facing the Palestinian people and besetting the peace process, the Committee calls on all States to join in that endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

I trust that the report I have just introduced will be of assistance to the General Assembly in its deliberations on this very important issue.

The President: I now give the floor to the Chairman of the observer delegation of Palestine.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to thank you, Sir, for your statements earlier at this meeting and at this morning's official meeting in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

A few weeks ago, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of its establishment by the General Assembly. That occasion embodied a great many of the issues related to the question of Palestine. It highlighted the permanent responsibility of the United Nations on the question of Palestine until its resolution in all its aspects, and the commitment of the members of the Committee to fulfil the mandate entrusted to them.

It also highlighted, however, the tragic reality that the Palestinian people, despite the passage of so many years and the positions of the United Nations and its various organs, is still being denied its inalienable rights, particularly its right to self-determination and national independence, all as a result of Israel's

rejection of the will of the international community and of international law, and its ongoing colonization of Palestinian land.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a similar case in which an entire people has been living either in exile for 57 years or under occupation for 38 years and subject to a de facto colonial settlement campaign, while the occupying Power continues to refuse to implement any of the numerous resolutions of the United Nations and continues to violate international law, including international humanitarian and human rights laws.

We wish to express our deep appreciation to the Chairman of the Committee and its members, and call on the States Members of the United Nations to maintain their support in the face of Israel's intransigence and rejection in order to resolve the question of Palestine and achieve genuine peace based on the two-State solution and the 1949 Armistice Line or what are commonly referred to as the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.

If that is to occur, the central task of the international community must be to achieve a real cessation of the colonizing of Palestinian territory, which is being pursued through the construction and expansion of settlements and the building of a wall on Palestinian land, including in and around East Jerusalem. Israel continues to construct settlements in defiance of the provisions of international law; of relevant United Nations resolutions, including those of the Security Council; and of the peace process and the provisions of the road map. Israel continues to build its wall despite the advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice and the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth emergency special session. Israel also continues to take illegal measures in and around East Jerusalem aimed at the Judaization and de facto annexation of the city, despite all of the foregoing.

Israel has thus been striving relentlessly to create conditions on the ground that, if allowed to persist, threaten to close the window of opportunity to achieve the two-State solution. Israel alone will be responsible for the collapse of the solution, but all of us — beginning, of course, with the Palestinian people — will pay the price. It is incumbent upon the international community to prevent that from happening and to safeguard the two-State solution. The first step must be to halt the settlement activities, the construction of the wall, and the Israeli measures in East Jerusalem.

In September, Israel carried out its disengagement plan in the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank. We consider that action to be an important development, and believe that the cessation of the colonization of parts of our Palestinian land, through the dismantling of the settlements and the withdrawal of the settlers and the Israeli occupying forces from the Gaza Strip, is a positive development potentially leading to others. However, the disengagement plan remains unilateral and Israel, in implementing it, wrought widespread destruction in the settlement areas and left many important issues unresolved, including those of the checkpoints, the airport, the seaport and the link between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Despite all that, agreement was recently reached on some of these important issues, first and foremost that of the Rafah crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt — an agreement which we hope will be implemented in full and appropriately and will lead to agreement on all the other pending issues. That is crucial to improving the living conditions of the population of the Gaza Strip, a small and impoverished region that is the most densely populated in the world.

We are also in urgent need of more assistance and its expeditious delivery in order to bear our additional burdens, not only in the Gaza Strip, but also in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We wish to commend the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Quartet, Mr. James Wolfensohn, to secure that assistance and to help the two parties to reach appropriate solutions.

Of great importance now, in addition to all of the foregoing, is guaranteeing that developments will not stop with the Gaza Strip. There must be a real opportunity to return to the road map, beginning with the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings, including an Israeli withdrawal from cities and areas to pre-September 2000 positions and the release of Palestinian prisoners and detainees. I reiterate that, whether or not we succeed in returning to the road map, we must definitely ensure the genuine cessation of settlement activities, the construction of the wall and other Israeli measures in Jerusalem. That

is all mandatory under international law and essential to the preservation of any hope for peace.

To that end, we need the Quartet to adopt specific and practical positions and an agreement on measures to be taken by Member States. We need action from everyone, including the Secretariat, which should, inter alia, implement the General Assembly resolution on the preparation of a register of damages caused by the construction of the wall.

The Palestinian people, the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian leadership find themselves shouldering the responsibility of fulfilling post-conflict tasks while remaining, in their entirety, under foreign occupation and subject to the ongoing colonization of their land. Such a situation has never arisen before and there is no precedent to draw upon. Nevertheless, we are making extraordinary efforts to succeed and have achieved reasonable results thanks to the resolve and imagination of our people, international political support and foreign assistance.

We are making efforts to build State institutions in order to achieve the rule of law and to strengthen the social fabric of our people. We are also in the process of filling the large vacuum left behind by the passing of our leader, President Yasser Arafat, and have managed to achieve a smooth transition of power and to hold new presidential elections that resulted in the election of President Mahmoud Abbas and his assumption of his duties.

In that context, we are also in the process of holding our second legislative elections. We wish to emphasize our opposition to any interference by Israel or any other party in those elections, which should be truly democratic and open to all Palestinians and all political groups and should be held throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The participation of all parties and groups will enhance the democratic process and the rule of law, and should be combined with and followed by measures and laws to consolidate the political system, including in areas related to weapons and other security issues.

Israel should not create obstacles to any of those important political processes, in particular with regard to freedom of movement and the participation of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Through a responsible national dialogue, we have been able to reach agreement on a unilateral approach to promoting calm and we understand the need to continue that process. In that regard, we believe the elections will have a positive impact.

As part of the international community, we reiterate our condemnation of terrorism in all its forms, including the latest terrorist attacks in the Jordanian capital, Amman. It so happens that one of the victims of the attacks was a colleague of ours from the Foreign Ministry. We must enhance our collective efforts to confront that phenomenon and must fortify our will through a clear and strong legal framework supported by all. We must all agree that any targeting of innocent civilians, anywhere at any time, regardless of the reasons, constitutes a condemnable terrorist act that we must combat.

We must also all agree that cases of armed conflict, including foreign occupation, are governed by international humanitarian law and are in accordance with those rules and provisions. We are convinced of those positions and will work tirelessly to achieve full compliance with all of those rules and provisions, including in our region. We also hope to contribute to the achievement of a consensus among all parties concerned to conclude a comprehensive convention to combat international terrorism.

We must save our region from future confrontations and conflicts. We are working hard to ensure that the Palestinian element in the region is positive. In that context, we wish Lebanon every success and prosperity and reaffirm that Palestinians in Lebanon are not party to any internal issues and that they are not above the law.

We also hope that Syria will be able to solve the problems related to Security Council resolution 1636 (2005) in a way that helps the investigation and preserves the dignity and sovereignty of Syria on the basis of respect for that resolution.

Naturally, we look forward to the return to normalcy in Iraq and to ending the violence and terrorism, while at the same time preserving Iraqi unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

There have been many extraordinary developments in the region, including in our country and in Israel. We hope those developments will enhance the potential for a speedy return to negotiations and to the actual implementation of the road map towards the achievement of peace in and

between two States, Israel and Palestine, as well as in the region and in the world in its entirety.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, I am honoured to express to Mr. Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to members of the Committee and to the staff of the Division for Palestinian Rights our appreciation for their commendable efforts to achieve justice for the Palestinian people.

On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the United Arab Emirates wishes to reaffirm its solidarity and support to the Palestinian people in their just struggle to achieve their legitimate aspiration to establish an independent State, like other peoples of the world.

In spite of some positive developments since last September, including Israel's military withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the agreement on the Rafah border crossing, the expected outcome of those developments has not yet been fully realized due to the obstacles created by the Israeli forces, which have prevented the achievement of full independence of the Gaza Strip and its crossings. Those obstacles include intensive and illegal settlement activities by Israel in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and continued daily violations against the Palestinian people. They have led to substantial losses in various sectors of the Palestinian economy, including the health, education, tourism and services sectors. This has made many Palestinian institutions economically sluggish and has led to acute increases in unemployment, poverty and disease among the Palestinian people. These Israeli policies in the Palestinian territories have impeded efforts and opportunities for achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peaceful solution to the Palestinian question.

The annual reports of various United Nations committees and agencies, supported by documents and statistics, continue to reflect Israel's true intentions and ambitions in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan. The reports confirm the increasing numbers of Palestinians who are killed or injured as a result of continued Israeli air strikes, the excessive use of force, targeted killings and the detention and displacement of thousands of civilians in the Palestinian territories administrated by the Israeli authorities, under the pretexts of combating terrorism and of self-defence.

During the past four years that Government has methodically torn away Palestinian agricultural lands and economic resources and destroyed more than 4,000 Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem and its environs. It has built new settlements, residential units and new bypass roads, confiscated thousands of acres of Palestinian land and imposed military authority and administration for the purpose of constructing the so-called separation wall. The wall has isolated thousands of Palestinian people in separate cantons, and dozens of villages have been annexed, separating the northern and southern parts of the West Bank. Palestinians have been deprived of the right of access to their homes, relatives in East Jerusalem and to sacred sites.

All of those Israeli actions violate United Nations resolutions, including those adopted at the Assembly's tenth emergency special session, and disregard the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which considers the construction of the wall to be illegal and invalid and calls for its immediate dismantling. The separation wall also obstructs the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian State and the principles of the road map, which calls for the realization of a vision of two States living side by side in peaceful coexistence.

The United Arab Emirates reiterates its strong condemnation of those Israeli practices, including the illegitimate and illegal measures taken in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which constitute a unilateral attempt to change the demographic, political and legal nature of the Palestinian territories and impose a fait accompli. We consider such attempts to be null and void. Such measures must be brought to an end before final status negotiations can bègin, as they constitute a blatant violation to the road map, international and humanitarian law, the United Nations Charter and resolutions and international conventions, including the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

The United Arab Emirates is extremely concerned about the serious consequences of those dangerous Israeli policies being ignored by the international community, policies that have fuelled frustration and despair among the peoples of the region and increased violence, tension and instability. We therefore emphasize once again the main common responsibility of the international community,

represented by the United Nations and its specialized agencies, in this regard. We call on the Security Council, and the Quartet in particular, to put the necessary pressure on Israel to end its hostile campaigns against the Palestinians and their National Authority, including collective punishment, State terrorism and incitement, with a view to creating an environment suitable for reinvigorating the peace process and resuming negotiations.

In this context, we call, first, for Israel to be forced to cooperate with the Palestinian Authority regarding its full withdrawal from all territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, to stop all illegal settlement activities in those territories, and to dismantle those settlements as well as the separation wall, in accordance with the relevant opinion of the International Court of Justice and relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

Secondly, Israel must provide protection for the Palestinian people, their national institutions and their sacred sites, the religious identity of which Israel is attempting to change especially the Al Aqsa Mosque. We also call on the international community to compel Israel to fulfil its commitments in accordance with international law and to prevent it from changing the historical landmarks of Jerusalem.

Thirdly, we call on the international community to provide political, financial and moral support to the Palestinian Authority, which has demonstrated its determination to fulfil its commitments in accordance with the road map and to carry out the necessary reforms in its national institutions, above all its security institutions. Such reforms will enable the Palestinian security institutions to fully discharge their national responsibilities, which include the management of the next legislative elections, the reconstruction of destroyed development sectors, the improvement of the painful humanitarian and social conditions in the Palestinian territories and the strengthening of its control over all Palestinian territories. Here, we cannot fail to welcome the commendable efforts of the Governments of Jordan and Egypt, the representative of the Quartet, James Wolfensohn, and the European Union in this respect.

Fourthly, we reaffirm the fundamental principles of the Palestinian question with regard to settlements, borders, refugees and the status of Jerusalem, as stipulated in internationally binding resolutions, notably General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III) and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), which are all consistent with the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the 2002 Beirut Summit.

We believe that an appropriate Israeli response to the just demands of the Arab people would lead to security and stability for the Israeli people and for the entire region. In this regard, we look forward to strengthening our peace effort, in order to reinvigorate the road map, as well as peace negotiations in the region, in fulfilment of the commitments included in resolutions of international legitimacy and in accordance with the principle of land for peace based on 1967 borders, in order to bring stability, prosperity, cooperation and development to the people of the entire region.

Mr. Hachani (Tunisia) (spoke in French): I would like to express deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, for having convened this special meeting, which has been held for half a century to focus the attention of the General Assembly on the question of Palestine and the struggle of Palestinian people. There can be no doubt that this central issue, which has attracted the attention of the entire international community, remains the most important issue affecting peace and stability in the Middle East, the cradle of civilizations.

The situation in the Middle East is at a very delicate stage. The entire international community, in particular the influential parties, are called upon to make efforts to end the cycle of violence and conflict in the region, to bring about a return to dialogue and negotiation and to embark on serious and responsible work with a view to putting an end to the conflict and to achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution that guarantees the liberation of all occupied Arab territories and allows for peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the region.

Tunisia, like other peace-loving countries, has from this position often warned the Assembly about dangers that will result from a failure of the peace process and the non-implementation of agreements with the Palestinian party, as well as the cessation of negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, because they all represent a setback to the peace efforts.

There can be no doubt that the intransigence of the Israeli Government with regard to its attitude towards Palestinian civilians, its expansionist policies and its insistence on the construction of the separation wall is counterproductive, as the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice makes clear, and is not in the interests of the region. The provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War have become ineffective because of such Israeli policies and practices. Violence only generates more violence. There is no way to break the cycle unless there is genuine and responsible engagement in the peace process and in the principles of the road map so that the vision of two States living side by side in peace, security and good-neighbourliness can be realized.

The establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the region requires a full and unconditional withdrawal by Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan and from the remaining occupied Lebanese territories, in accordance with all the relevant resolutions and terms of reference.

The Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the opening of the Rafah Crossing are both positive developments within the framework of the implementation of the road map. We hope they will be followed by similar and expeditious measures in the West Bank and in other occupied Palestinian territories. We must not allow internal considerations in the region to further delay the search for peace.

The road towards peace remains long and difficult. It will require all our efforts to protect the peace endeavour and to refrain from making confrontational statements, which only undermine trust and confidence between the parties to the conflict. It is essential for the international community to learn from past experiences so as to avoid all elements and shortfalls that impeded the peace process. We look forward with hope to the Quartet's efforts to reactivate the road map, to restore trust between the Palestinians and Israelis and to open the way for the resumption of peace negotiations in order to enable the Palestinian people to enjoy its legitimate rights, particularly the right to establish its own independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.

Tunisia's strong belief in the just cause of the Palestinian people and its constant commitment to support them in their hour of need will only enhance efforts to reach a peaceful, just and comprehensive settlement in accordance with the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted at the Beirut Summit in March 2002. Tunisia will continue its bilateral, regional and international efforts under the leadership of its President, His Excellency Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question that will enable the Palestinian people to enjoy their legitimate rights and will establish security, stability and peaceful coexistence in the region so that its peoples can focus on development and reconstruction.

Here we cannot fail to express our heartfelt appreciation for all efforts made by the United Nations, as the guarantor and protector of the principles of international legitimacy, to address the crisis in the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli conflict. In particular, we should like to commend the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, under the skilful leadership of Ambassador Badji, and other United Nations committees and bodies that are working to establish peace in the region. They must continue their efforts until they complete their mandates under the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

Mrs. Ismail (Malaysia): At the outset, my delegation would like to associate itself with the statement made earlier by Mr. Paul Badji, Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We thank the Committee for its report (A/60/35). We also thank the Secretary-General for his report submitted under agenda item 15 (A/60/5[illegible]). We continue to greatly appreciate the indispensable work carried out by the Committee, by the Secretariat's Division for Palestinian Rights and by other organs within the United Nations system concerning the question before us. We highly commend the commitment, efforts and contribution of the Secretary-General and his Office in that regard. We hope that they will persevere in carrying out their mandates and tasks until peace is achieved in the region and a State of Palestine is created, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Today, we are observing the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The Prime Minister of Malaysia, in his capacity as Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), has transmitted a message for that occasion, which outlines the concerns

and aspirations of NAM on the question of Palestine. The statement should be read in conjunction with that message.

The reports of the Committee and of the Secretary-General continue to contain very disturbing accounts and revelations and to reflect stark realities concerning the situation on the ground. There have certainly been too many deaths, too many injuries, too much destruction and indescribable suffering — especially among the Palestinians — as a result of repressive policies, practices and measures carried out by Israel. All this is contrary to Israel's obligation under international law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law. The international community must prevail upon Israel to respect its legal obligations, just as other States are expected to do. We have a duty at the United Nations to stop all the continuing atrocities and abhorrent policies and practices committed by Israel against the Palestinian population.

We should not consider the casualties and destruction on both sides in terms of numbers or percentages alone. The life of each human being — man, woman or child — is sacred and precious, and it must be protected. Any act of violence inflicted upon innocent civilians in this conflict, be they Palestinians or Israelis, is unacceptable and deserves equal condemnation by all of us.

The period under review has seen several measures and efforts by both the Palestinians and the Israelis towards peace within the framework of the road map. However, the path towards peace remains a difficult and complicated process. The difficulties could be overcome by stronger political will among all parties concerned. In that connection, my delegation considers the resumption of dialogue at the highest level between Palestinian and Israeli leaders, as well as renewed efforts by members of the Quartet, to be a very encouraging development. We also commend Egypt and Jordan for their role in facilitating the peace process. We are confident that all parties concerned will persevere in their important efforts.

In addition, we consider Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and from parts of the northern West Bank last September to be a positive move. However, we strongly oppose the expansion and planned further expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. They are contrary to Israel's obligations under the road map.

We welcome the historic reopening three days ago of the Rafah Crossing, a crucial link between the Gaza Strip and the outside world. That positive development not only has provided the 1.3 million mostly impoverished Palestinians in that area with access to various types of humanitarian assistance in neighbouring Egypt and offered them greater opportunities for economic activity and employment, but, most important, it has marked the regaining by the Palestinian people of an important part of their freedom and control of their own borders in that area after 38 years of Israeli occupation.

Israel's ongoing construction of the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, seriously endangers the prospects for comprehensive peace in the region. The impact of the wall on all aspects of Palestinian life in the areas concerned, as documented in several United Nations reports, is overwhelming. The wall threatens the territorial integrity of a future State of Palestine, as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002) and upheld in the road map.

The wall is one of the most visible signs of the transformation of the territory into a vast open-air prison — something that is unprecedented in modern history. The wall is a visible and clear act of territorial annexation by Israel under the guise of self-defence and security. As we are all aware, the wall was declared contrary to international law by the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, in its advisory opinion rendered on 9 July 2004. The General Assembly consequently adopted, by an overwhelming majority, resolution ES-10/15 outlining several important follow-up and concrete measures and, inter alia, demanding that Israel stop the construction of the wall, dismantle and remove the completed sections of the wall, and pay reparations to all those affected by the construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory. We renew our call on Israel to take all necessary measures to comply with the International Court of Justice advisory opinion and resolution ES-10/15. We find it highly regrettable that the Security Council has not been able to look into the specific question of the separation wall in accordance with its functions and powers under Article 24 of the United Nations Charter.

The question of Palestine remains high on the agenda of both the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Malaysia, as Chair of NAM and the tenth OIC summit, has initiated several high-level initiatives relating to the question of Palestine this year. Some of those initiatives are as follows.

First, Malaysian civil society organizations, under the sponsorship of Peace Malaysia, successfully convened a World Civil Society Conference on Peace in Palestine in Putrajaya, Malaysia, from 28 to 30 March 2005. The Conference, which was held pursuant to a decision by NAM and attended by representatives of civil society organizations from many parts of the world, including Israel, agreed, inter alia, to establish an international centre on Palestine for civil society in the south, to be located in Malaysia. The international centre would serve as a focal point for the global civil society campaign in support of Palestine. It is the Movement's hope that the international campaign will be able to mobilize international public opinion against the continued Israeli occupation and illegal construction of the wall and settlements, and in support of the early realization of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine.

Secondly, the foreign ministers of NAM, who met in Doha in June and in New York in September, and the Foreign Ministers of OIC, who met in Sana'a in June and in New York in September, expressed, inter alia, their solidarity and support for the Palestinian people, as well as the need for the members of the Quartet to fulfil their responsibility to fully implement the road map towards the viable creation of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine.

Thirdly, the foreign ministers of the NAM Committee on Palestine, who met in New York on 19 September, agreed on a number of measures to be taken by NAM in the context of the Movement's strong support for the Palestinian cause, aimed at moving the peace process forward.

Finally, the NAM and OIC ministerial delegations on Palestine met with their counterparts from the Quartet and permanent members of the Security Council at the margins of the High-level Plenary Meeting and the general debate of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session. During those meetings, they conveyed the position of NAM and OIC on the urgency of pushing the peace process forward, beginning with salvaging the road map, as well as the concerns of both organizations on the continuing construction of the separation wall and the Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory.

It is incumbent upon Israel to demonstrate to the international community that it is genuinely committed to a peaceful solution rather than to a military one. Israel must realize that there can never be a military solution to the conflict. Similarly, the Palestinian Authority, with assistance from the international community, should continue with efforts to reform its relevant institutions and improve its security apparatus. My delegation commends the Palestinian Authority for what it has achieved in that regard, despite various constraints. We urge both sides to continue to create, on the basis of and in compliance with the road map, the necessary environment that would enable negotiations to take place. The objective of a permanent two-State solution of Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders, is achievable. The international community has a collective role to play in that regard. We must all work together to facilitate and redouble our efforts to attain a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The United Nations, including the General Assembly and the Security Council, has a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects on the basis of the Charter and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. The question should also be resolved in accordance with international law. In that connection, my delegation reaffirms its support for the important efforts of the Quartet and other concerned parties in pursuing the difficult and complicated path towards peace. The General Assembly is the last bastion of hope for the Palestinian people. The Assembly must uphold the rule of law and the purposes and principles of the Charter. In that connection, Malaysia is pleased to join other delegations in sponsoring the four draft resolutions initiated by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which have been presented by the Chairman of the Committee for consideration by the Assembly under this important agenda item.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly is meeting once again to discuss the question of Palestine, an international issue that the

international community has failed to settle over more than half a century.

Our discussion today is of special importance, coinciding as it does with our observation of the Organization's sixtieth anniversary and with efforts to implement the outcome document of the High-level Plenary Meeting in order to establish a more effective United Nations capable of upholding the principles on which it was founded and that are the indispensable basis of a more peaceful, prosperous and just world, in particular the principles of justice and equality and the rights of peoples suffering under colonial control and foreign occupation to exercise self-determination.

In that respect, the spirit of the United Nations sixtieth anniversary should embody the spirit of the resolutions adopted every year by the General Assembly on the question of Palestine, which call on Israel to withdraw from all Palestinian and Arab territories occupied in 1967 and to restore the full rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among which are the right of return of Palestinian refugees; the right to self-determination, the right to establish their independent State on their own land, with East Jerusalem as its capital; and the right to live free of all violations of their human rights, including their right to life.

The spirit of our tireless work should also extend to including Palestine in the implementation of the final document of the world summit, which marked the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations. The principles and values that we have all reaffirmed should be applied to that question. We should strive to enhance the values of justice and equality, and we should strengthen the understanding of Israel's responsibility as an occupying Power, until the Palestinian State is established as soon as possible. We should also intensify our efforts for the establishment of a Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

Similarly, our quest to increase respect for human rights and to decrease selectivity, politicization and the use of double standards requires us to put an end to all violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people. We should address the human rights of Palestinians and Israelis on an equal and just basis. We should put an end to the inhumane practices against the Palestinians resulting from the policies of siege, closure, continued settler expansion, confiscation of land, destruction of agriculture and the construction of the separation wall within the Palestinian territories. This separation wall is in clear violation of the legal and moral values of the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion in the case concerning the *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*.

Furthermore, our work to enhance the system of collective security requires us to enhance the security of the Palestinian people within the borders of their occupied territories. We should put an end to the policy of assassinating activists and provide the Palestinian Authority with the full opportunity to perform its role — to control the security situation on Palestinian lands without interference, and to strengthen its authority to implement the security needs of those lands as the Palestinian people desire.

Proceeding from the same basis, the United Nations should maximize its use of the Peacebuilding Commission when it is established, to enable it to take the Palestinian people, economically and socially, to a new level. They could then realize their wishes and aspirations for a better life and advance from the status of occupation to one of freedom and stability within the framework of effective international support, a status based on the democratic practices that will be confirmed by the elections to be conducted, freely and without interference, in 2006.

Similarly, our work in the field of institutional reform should be based on the promotion and reactivation of the work of all committees, bodies and secretariats in charge of guaranteeing the full exercise by the Palestinian people of their rights. Such work should not be replaced by attempts for whatever reason to limit the activities of the United Nations in that important field.

Therefore, we call upon all Member States to endorse all draft resolutions submitted under the present agenda item. Based upon our strong belief in the crucial role of the United Nations, Egypt, together with other internationally influential parties, strongly supports the special role played by the Quartet to guarantee the success of efforts aimed at the application of the road map towards final status negotiations.

We call upon the United Nations to make every effort in that regard until those objectives are realized. We would also like to reiterate that we will make every

possible effort whenever such effort is required, until an independent Palestinian State is established.

In that context, we welcome the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and from some Palestinian cities in the West Bank, as well as the opening of the Rafah crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. We call upon the Israeli Government to proceed further by withdrawing from all occupied Palestinian territories and to implement its obligations under the road map so that we can achieve our common objective — the establishment of two independent States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security.

That achievement should be based on a number of principles and values, the most important of which is that the Israeli withdrawal should be part of the implementation of the road map and should be followed by other steps, such as withdrawal from the remaining Palestinian territories in the West Bank and from Jerusalem, and an agreement on a final settlement. That withdrawal should also include all crossings, seaports and airports and should guarantee the freedoms of the Palestinian people. The Israeli policies of incursion, invasion and assassination, besieging the Gaza Strip and targeting its population on any pretext should end.

International consensus on the promotion of the multilateral order should contribute to the realization of the vision of the two States in an equitable and just manner, in strict implementation of the stipulations of the road map, without bias or selectivity, and through the creation of a genuine partnership among the major parties on the international scene — foremost among which is the Quartet — in order to achieve a just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine.

Only then can we recognize that the United Nations has achieved its objectives in terms of respect for its values and principles and in guaranteeing security and respect for human rights. That is when all of the international efforts to assist the Palestinian people in building a better future will also be realized. We hope that that will occur as soon as possible.

Mr. Sen (India): India has warmly welcomed the agreement concluded between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the Rafah border crossing for travel between Gaza and Egypt and for building a seaport in the Gaza Strip. We believe that that was a significant development that will go a long way towards improving the lives and economy of the Palestinian people living in the Gaza Strip. There also seems to be a need for a floating dock or some other such arrangement, which can be operationalized quickly, because the belief that there is no guaranteed border outlet seems to be holding back foreign investors.

The opening of the Rafah border crossing last Saturday, which enabled 1,548 Palestinians to cross into Egypt without being subject to Israeli checks for the first time, has raised hopes for further progress in efforts to revitalize the Middle East peace process. There have also been other signs generating optimism this year. The election of President Mahmoud Abbas in January 2005 demonstrated the commitment of the Palestinian people to democracy.

In September, Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank, marking Israel's first withdrawal from occupied Palestinian territory since 1967. That landmark event set an important precedent for the eventual realization of a two-State solution. India welcomed the withdrawal as a positive development and the beginning of a process that, we hoped, would take forward the negotiations in accordance with the road map and the relevant Security Council resolutions. The elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council, scheduled for January 2006, will provide further incentive for the Palestinians to fully engage in the democratic process.

With a renewed sense of optimism also comes the hard reckoning of reality. The report of the Secretary-General on the agenda items under consideration, contained in document A/60/539 and dated 7 November 2005, draws attention to the fact that the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people in 2004 remained grave. About half lived below the official poverty line of $2.10 per day, compared to just 22 per cent in 2000. Furthermore, 16 per cent of Palestinians — approximately 560,000 people — were in deep poverty. Unemployment increased more than threefold since 2000, reaching a figure of 238,000 unemployed in 2004, largely as a result of roadblocks on roads within and leading to the occupied Palestinian territory. Palestinians continued to face problems reaching their places of work, schools and hospitals, and standards of health and education continued to deteriorate. In some parts of the territory, Palestinians' needs for additional humanitarian assistance rose sharply as a consequence.

The report of the Secretary-General also expresses concern over Israel's continued settlement expansion and unilateral construction of the wall in the West Bank. It points out that lack of action to remove illegal settlement outposts erected since 2001 has severely undermined trust in Israel's intentions and that Government-sponsored settlement activity has a negative impact on the territorial contiguity of Palestinian territory and thus remains a source of serious concern.

According to the road map, Israel has an obligation to freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth, and immediately dismantle outposts erected illegally since March 2001. The report also states that Israel continues its unilateral construction of the wall on Palestinian land and that, along with continued Israeli settlement activity, this constitutes a key challenge to the fulfilment of the road map's goal of a two-State solution.

At this critical stage, it is all the more important for the international community to take steps for the smooth implementation of Palestinian trade and transit access, both within its territories and with the outside world. It is equally important for Israel to stop settlement activity, lift curfews and ease restrictions on the movement of persons and goods and thereby significantly improve the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories. Israel's actions should not prejudge final status issues or threaten longer-term prospects for peace by making the creation of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State much more difficult.

The problem is that settlement activity leads to cantonization and changes patterns of transportation and access. The wall's encroachment on Palestinian land and interests creates great hardships for the Palestinian people affected by its construction and exacerbates the situation by placing populations, agricultural land and a part of the West Bank aquifer beyond their reach. Moreover, the continued construction of the wall on Palestinian land threatens to prejudge the eventual outcome of the final status negotiations between the parties. We therefore reiterate our call on Israel to abide by its legal obligations as set forth in the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and resolution ES-10/15 of the General Assembly.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority has to shoulder its responsibility by undertaking action on the ground to halt violence. As the report of the Secretary-General points out, the Palestinian Authority must push ahead with efforts to reform the Palestinian security services. Decisive action in that regard should help to restore law and order.

Over the years, India has assisted the Palestinian Authority through development projects and human resources development. Indian assistance projects in the Palestinian Authority include the construction and establishment of the Jawaharlal Nehru Library at the Al-Azhar University in Gaza City and the Mahatma Gandhi Library and student activity centre at the Palestinian Technical College at Deir Al-Balah in the Gaza Strip.

During the visit of President Abbas to India in May 2005, the Prime Minister of India announced a grant of $15 million to Palestine for developmental projects, in addition to a grant announced earlier this year. Those grants will, inter alia, fund hospitals and information technology centres in Gaza and Ramallah, an Indian Chair at Al-Quds University and a school in Abu Dis.

We wish also to recall the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, who passed away on 11 November 2004. For nearly four decades, he represented the national aspirations of the Palestinian people. On this occasion, we wish to pay homage to his memory and recall his everlasting contribution to the Palestinian cause.

We urge both Palestinians and Israelis to make optimal use of the opportunities provided by that new beginning. The ceasefire concluded at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit in February 2005 has broadly survived, resulting in a noticeable improvement in the security situation, marked by a decrease in the number of deaths since then. It is necessary to renew and redouble efforts so the peace process can move forward in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Quartet's road map and international law. The international community must press both parties to renew parallel action on their obligations under the road map, which constitutes for both Israel and the Palestinians the best opportunity to move beyond the conflict towards peace, security and prosperity. The international community must also continue to assist the parties to simultaneously address economic, humanitarian, security and political issues.

Mr. Cabral (Guinea-Bissau), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We hope that a negotiated solution to end the conflict will be quickly found. The vision of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel within secure and recognized borders remains as valid as at any other time — and that vision is perhaps more attainable now. India urges the parties concerned and the international community to press for a just and comprehensive resolution of the conflict and the broader achievement of peace, security and stability for the entire region at the earliest possible time, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003).

India has advocated a comprehensive solution to the situation in the Middle East as the logical next step in the resolution of the wider Israeli-Arab conflict at the regional level, as envisaged by the Saudi Arabian peace initiative. The principle of land for peace is equally valid in addressing the other tracks of the Middle East conflict. We sincerely hope that the comprehensive political process can be revived at the earliest possible time.

Mr. Baali (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*A/60/35*) under consideration by the Assembly today describes in a lucid and impartial fashion the tragic situation in which the Palestinian people continue to live in their homeland, occupied by Israel. The report places our consideration of the Palestinian question in a particularly worrisome context. It shows — if it were still necessary to do so — that it is essential that the Committee pursue its work and activities in accordance with its mandate as long as Israel continues to occupy Palestinian territories and persists in its flagrant violations of international law.

The year that has just ended has been marked by Israel's pursuit of its policy of colonization and repression, leaving a trail of atrocities, abuses and confiscations in its wake. Amid that atmosphere of death and destruction, a glimmer of hope appeared with Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. For this withdrawal to mark a genuine break with the past and to relaunch the dynamic of peace, it must be part of the broader framework of the road map, opening the way to the withdrawal of Israel forces and the dismantlement of all settlements in the West Bank and around Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

The continuing construction of the separation wall, the intensification and expansion of settlement activities in the West Bank and the continued isolation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank remain sources of grave concern for my delegation and give rise to serious misgivings about Israel's real intentions with respect to the final status of the territory. Through those measures, Israel is, in reality, drawing a new map of the occupied territories on the ground, thus severely compromising the chances of a future independent Palestinian State. Those measures further jeopardize the integrity and the territorial contiguity of the future State.

My country reaffirms its principled position that the settlements and the wall being constructed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, violate international law and Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and are contrary to the provisions of the road map.

My country is deeply concerned about the very serious deterioration of the humanitarian, economic and social aspects of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, and we reiterate our strong condemnation of the inhuman practices of the Israeli army against the Palestinians, their property and their institutions.

Today, on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People — who have now seen another milestone in this long period of destruction and injustice — my country, Algeria, reaffirms its firm support for the struggle of that brave people to achieve their inalienable national rights.

The time has come for the international community to shoulder its responsibilities and put an end to the Israeli policy of occupation. The Security Council has recently been seen acting with uncommon speed, vigour and effectiveness to bring about a withdrawal of foreign forces in that same region. If the Council wishes to maintain its credibility in the eyes of the international community, it must act with the same resolve, including by invoking Chapter VII of the Charter, to ensure that Israel withdraws unconditionally and without delay from all the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, in compliance with international law. The withdrawal should be accompanied by the total and unconditional

freeze of settlement activity throughout the occupied Palestinian territories and the cessation of the wall's construction, as well as by the demolition of those sections that have already been completed, in accordance with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and as endorsed by the Assembly. Those actions would ensure a successful outcome to the withdrawal from Gaza and a serious resumption of negotiations on the issue of final status, which has been postponed for too long.

The international community, represented by the Quartet, is called upon to become further engaged in order to bring a lasting and just solution to the Middle East conflict based on compliance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1515 (2003) and 1544 (2004), the principle of land for peace and full implementation of the road map endorsed by the Security Council.

While reaffirming my country's support for a peaceful, negotiated solution based on international law, as President Abdelaziz Bouteflika solemnly recalled at the Summit of South American and Arab Countries held in Brasilia in May 2005, we are more convinced than ever that a final settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict must be based on an end to the occupation and the withdrawal of the Israeli army from all occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and the last remaining occupied enclave in Lebanon, the cessation of all settlement activities throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, the dismantling of existing settlements, the cessation of the building of the separation wall and the renunciation of all policies tending to inflame passions and jeopardize the success of the peace process.

The Assembly must respond adequately to the rational aspiration of the Palestinian people to recover their legitimate rights, in particular the right to self-determination and the right to create their own independent State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): The debate on the question of Palestine coincides with the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. When the General Assembly adopted resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977 establishing the International Day, no one had any doubt that the Assembly was aware of its responsibilities towards the Palestinian people and their hardships or that it was aware of the need to work tirelessly to find a comprehensive and just solution to the question of Palestine. The observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is of special importance because it affords the international community an opportunity to renew that commitment.

My delegation thanks the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their commendable efforts with respect to the question of Palestine and for their important annual report (*A/60/35*). We thank the Chairman and the members of the Committee for their efforts. We are aware of the difficulties they face in the examination and analysis of the facts of this important issue as they seek to help the Palestinian people exercise their inalienable rights.

The Committee's report illustrates several points that had been ambiguous due to efforts to distort and conceal the facts. Continued illegal actions exacerbate the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. Our concern about settlement expansion and the construction of the illegal separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territories is growing more acute because of the intensified expansion of existing settlements and the building of new ones, and the accelerated pace to complete the construction of the separation wall.

According to the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, contained in document A/60/271, the construction of the wall and the expansion of the settlements — two outcomes of the occupation — are two factors that undermine the fundamental right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

The violation of all other rights of the Palestinians derives from the violation of that fundamental right of self-determination, since occupation by its very nature leads to human rights violations. Those violations take place before the eyes of the international community, in contravention of international law and instruments and international decisions and resolutions, including Security Council resolution 446 (1979) on the issue of Israeli settlements and the lack of any legal basis for the construction of such settlements. Council resolution 465 (1980) calls for existing settlements to be dismantled.

Israel's policy and practices with respect to the settlements and its welcoming of new immigrants to them is in flagrant violation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. The continuation of those practices seriously impedes the implementation of a comprehensive, lasting and just peace in the Middle East. Likewise, such practices are in violation of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004, which states that the building of the separation wall is illegal and calls for its dismantlement.

Rather than comply with international law, the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and United Nations resolutions, Israel continues to build and expand settlements in the West Bank, in violation of article 49, paragraph 6, of the Fourth Geneva Convention. That practice continues without interruption even before Israel carries out a new plan that would establish the largest settlement project, resulting in the confiscation of territory in the West Bank that exceeds the Gaza Strip in size. Those construction activities have continued in flagrant violation of international instruments and the Quartet's road map, and, as the Special Rapporteur notes in his report, will create a situation in which the road map will become essentially meaningless.

No one doubts that the situation is worsening as a result of the occupying Power's ongoing construction of the separation wall in the West Bank, which has been condemned by the international community. In addition, the construction of the separation wall around Jerusalem violates Security Council resolution 476 (1980), which rejected laws adopted by the Israeli parliament to make Jerusalem the permanent capital of Israel, and resolution 478 (1980) of 20 August 1980, which reaffirmed the Council's determination that all legislative and administrative measures that have sought to alter the character and status of Jerusalem, in particular the basic law on Jerusalem and other such decisions, are null and void.

It appears that Israel is building the separation wall in the West Bank and around Jerusalem in an attempt to achieve its expansionist aims in occupied Palestinian territory. That can be seen from the commitment made by the Prime Minister of Israel, during the High-level Meeting on 15 September, to complete the construction of the separation wall. That declaration prompted the Palestinian Rights Committee to reiterate in its report its concern that Israel was attempting to unilaterally define the future borders of the Palestinian State.

Among the separation wall's negative consequences are its effects on the economic and social situation of the Palestinians. The destruction of Palestinian land and property has irreversible consequences and will undermine the ability of Palestinians to rebuild and revitalize their economy, which has become more fragile since September 2000.

Palestinians have spared no effort to end the tragic situation. They have signed peace agreements. Arab leaders as well have explored all avenues in the quest for a comprehensive and just peace in the region and have endorsed various peace initiatives reflecting that approach, such as the Arab peace initiative adopted at the 2002 Beirut summit.

The withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip was welcomed as an indicator of further steps to be taken. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People confirmed that the withdrawal could help revive peace negotiations within the context of the road map, with the goal of creating an independent, contiguous Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

The road map remains the logical and proper framework for achieving a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question based on the 4 June 1967 borders and implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003).

Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): The debate on the question of Palestine is particularly important, as it deals with an issue that has serious humanitarian and security implications. It is indeed a painful exercise to discuss an issue such as the question of Palestine, which involves grave injustice, repression and suffering that surpasses all limits.

The report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (*A/60/380*) and the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*A/60/35*) state that the situation is indeed a painful one of limitless suffering. The continued construction of the separation wall, in spite of its illegality according to the advisory opinion of the

International Court of Justice, has led to the annexation of even more Palestinian territory and has created isolated plots of land where freedom of movement of Palestinians is prevented. Family members cannot visit one another, and health care and educational institutions have become inaccessible. The problems created by the wall have increased the suffering of women, children and the elderly, who are deprived of medical attention and access to education.

Palestinians are forced into living on destroyed plots or are displaced as a result of continued military aggression, house demolitions, the uprooting of trees, the destruction of infrastructure, the closure of roads and crossings, the intensification of sieges and the increase in Israeli settlement activities. Israeli actions target entire communities, preventing people from practising their livelihoods, from attending schools and universities or visiting health and social institutions. As a result, poverty is exacerbated among the Palestinians, causing economic hardship and deteriorating living conditions. Israel progressively and systematically seeks to crush and obliterate all the elements that would help in the creation of a future State of Palestine as a contiguous geographical entity and a viable State, which would be a factor in consolidating peace and stability in the region and the world.

This year's debate on the question of Palestine comes after the issuance of the report of the Special Committee, which describes the feelings of despair that exist in the region as a result of the suffering among Palestinians caused by Israeli practices. The international community has the responsibility to spare no effort to put an end to the Israeli practices and measures against the unarmed Palestinian population. It must also ensure that Israel complies with its agreements and international resolutions, allows the Palestinian elections to proceed on time and according to plan and to be successful, allows all Palestinians, including the inhabitants of East Jerusalem, to participate in the elections, lifts the blockades unconditionally imposed on the Palestinian people and ends the construction of the racist separation wall, dismantling those sections that have already been completed.

Israel must end all colonial settlement planning and activities and withdraw from the territories it has occupied since 1967 in Palestine, the Syrian Golan and the Shaba'a farms area in southern Lebanon.

The international community must also reject as illegitimate all Israeli resolutions and measures that are contrary to international legitimacy, including all attempts to undermine the sovereignty of the Holy City, which will be the capital of the Palestinian State. A just solution to the refugee problem must be found, in accordance with international resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 194 (III). The Palestinian people must be allowed to establish an independent State on their national soil.

The world's hopes were revived following Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip as a first step. The international community must now put further pressure on Israel to push it along that same track and take further steps to withdraw to the borders of 4 June 1967 in order to achieve a lasting, comprehensive and just settlement of the conflict, based on the belief that all individuals have the right to live in peace and not at the expense of others. The settlement must be based as well on a return to the peace process in conformity with the Arab peace initiative, the Madrid Conference, the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, the road map and the principle of land for peace so that the Palestinian people can create an independent State on their national soil.

We commend the recent efforts of the Secretary of State of the United States, which led to an agreement on the freedom of movement at Palestinian crossings, as well as the efforts of the Quartet to advance the peace process in the region.

Ms. Nuñez Mordoche (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The consideration of the items on the Assembly's agenda at today's joint debate takes on special importance during this month of November, as much because of recent events in the Middle East as because of the historic events currently being commemorated. Only a few days ago, on 11 November, we commemorated the first anniversary of the passing of Yasser Arafat. The historic leader of the Palestinians died before seeing his and his people's great dream realized. The establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital remains a chimera.

In addition, today we are celebrating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, a date on which all peoples and Governments of goodwill extend their support to that heroic people

in their efforts to achieve independence and self-determination.

However, instability continues in the Middle East, a situation characterized by the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, the ongoing foreign occupation of Iraq and the threats being prepared against Syria, which make use of inconsistencies orchestrated in the Security Council.

In the past we had the opportunity to be informed of the situation prevailing in the occupied Arab territories thanks to the valuable and dedicated work of the various bodies established by the Organization to investigate actions committed against the Palestinian people and to alleviate their suffering.

The statistics speak for themselves. From 1 January to 19 August 2005 — in just seven and a half months — 146 Palestinians died in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Since the beginning of the second intifada, 3,663 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces. The destructive fury of Israeli bulldozers has expelled more than 16,000 Palestinians from their homes in the past year. Clearly, an entire people is being massacred in a flagrant, massive and systematic manner.

In spite of its withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, Israel continues to illegally occupy or control great expanses of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territory, while failing to heed the numerous resolutions of the Assembly and the Security Council demanding the return of those territories. In that context, Cuba wishes to reaffirm the need for full compliance, without exception or discrimination, with all Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on the situation in the Middle East, especially Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

It is also worth mentioning that the Security Council has experienced ongoing obstruction by the United States with regard to this issue, especially during the last five years of Republican Administration. The historic tally of the Security Council's work includes 29 vetoes, with many threats of more, in instances when the Council has attempted to adopt a draft resolution that would contribute to ending the massacre of an entire people. The customary application of double standards and the vetoes and threats of veto to which I referred have simply led to stagnation in the Council as regards this matter.

As we have said before, we should not be confused by the recent unilateral withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip and the evacuation of settlements there. We should not think that that is the beginning of the end of Israel's genocidal policy in the area or that it represents a way to reach a definitive solution to the Palestinian issue. Israel continues to control the airspace, the territorial borders and the sea. Israel continues to be the occupying Power exercising control over the area.

Israel is also continuing to build the illegal separation wall, confiscating arable land from the future State of Palestine, separating families and impeding the freedom of movement. The wall has left more than 20,000 Palestinians without a way to earn a living and has stripped them of their patrimony. It has also led to the confiscation of thousands of hectares of land and water wells in the West Bank, which is tantamount to the de facto seizure of approximately 60 per cent of the territory, including East Jerusalem. Entire Palestinian areas have been deprived access to vital basic services, including education, health and employment.

The provisions of resolution ES-10/15 have also been ignored. In quoting the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, resolution ES-10/15 states, in its twentieth preambular paragraph, that

> "The construction of the wall being built by Israel, the occupying Power, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, and its associated regime, are contrary to international law".

The United Nations should continue to work to achieve just and lasting peace in the region. The international community and this Organization have long owed the Palestinian people its own State. All the time and resources devoted to that goal are insignificant compared to the debt owed by humankind to that suffering and heroic people. In that undertaking — as necessary as it is urgent — Cuba is making its usual constructive contribution and extends its support and solidarity to the United Nations and the international community.

Our own country, which has been subjected to a harsh blockade by the Government of the United States for over 45 years, is convinced that no wall, fence, or repression — however violent or inhumane — is capable of breaking the Palestinian people's ardent

desire for sovereignty and independence. It is for that reason that, thanks to our experience during more than 45 years of resistance, Cuba supports a peaceful and negotiated solution to the Palestinian issue. Cuba would also like to reiterate its strong support for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent and sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We also demand the unconditional return of all Arab territories occupied by Israel, and we reaffirm the illegal character of all Israeli settlements in Arab territories occupied since 1967, including the occupied Syrian Golan.

In conclusion, Cuba calls upon all delegations to vote in favour of the draft resolutions introduced under the two agenda items under consideration, thereby expressing their unwavering support to the just cause of the Palestinian people.

Mr. Abdelbari (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The question of Palestine, which is at the heart of the conflict in the Middle East, is undoubtedly a focal point for the entire world. The Palestinian tragedy has become a tragedy for the human conscience. The deteriorating security situation and the continuing escalation of violence speak loudly to every human conscience and call for a firm stand against Israeli arrogance and intransigence.

Israel's arrogant attitude vis-à-vis resolutions of international legitimacy, on the one hand, and the international community's lenience, on the other, have led Israel to commit massacres and barbaric acts against civilians and unarmed innocent people in all Palestinian areas, especially in the Gaza Strip following the so-called withdrawal. They have even led Israel to brutalize the Palestinian people with complete impunity and to reject all relevant international resolutions.

The steadfast Palestinian people continues to face unjust Israeli practices and policies. Homes are demolished with their inhabitants inside; land is confiscated; elderly persons, the young, women, children and other unarmed Palestinians are killed. More important and grave is the fact that Israel is continuing to build its illegal wall on usurped Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem. Israel is continuing its wanton aggression by destroying homes and confiscating land, in clear and direct violation of international law, international humanitarian law and other international human rights instruments.

Israel is also continuing to disregard General Assembly resolution ES-10/15, adopted at the tenth emergency special session, as well as the International Court of Justice advisory opinion on the wall it is building. The Court has declared that wall illegal and has called for Israel to immediately cease its construction and to demolish what has already been built, to repeal all legislation relating to the wall and to pay compensation to those who have been harmed by it.

The credibility of this Organization should be reflected in its ability to uphold the Charter and implement international law. The fact that this matter has not been resolved is a testament to the existence of a policy of double standards and selectivity in the application of Security Council resolutions and international law as adopted by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

That fact also attests to the shameful silence that exists with regard to a clear violation of the Charter of the United Nations and of the principles of international humanitarian law, in particular the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, and other agreements.

It is incumbent upon all concerned to oblige Israel fully to withdraw from Arab territories occupied since 4 June 1967, including Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as the Shaba'a Farms in Lebanon, in implementation of the principle of land for peace and of the relevant United Nations resolutions, foremost among which are General Assembly resolution 181 (II) and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), and in keeping with the decisions taken at Oslo and Madrid, other relevant Security Council resolutions, and the road map that has been agreed to by all.

My delegation would like to urge the international community and its member States urgently to provide economic and technical assistance to the Palestinian people and to the Palestinian National Authority during this delicate phase in order to help alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people and to enable it to rebuild its economy and the basic infrastructure of the State of Palestine.

We would like also to reiterate our unswerving support for the Palestinian cause and for the draft resolutions submitted to the General Assembly in that regard. We would like also to urge all Member States to take the same stance as they have in the past.

Mr. O'Brien (United States of America): The United States remains firmly committed to achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We welcomed the successful withdrawal of Israeli settlers from the northern West Bank and Gaza earlier this year. United States efforts continue to focus on sustaining momentum on economic and security issues after disengagement in order to make progress along the road map towards President Bush's vision of a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The 15 November agreement on movement and access between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is an important step forward. For the first time since 1967, Palestinians will control access at the Rafah crossing, which opened on 25 November. We will continue to work via the Quartet Special Envoy and United States Security Coordinator missions on the economic and security agenda and maintain the momentum for disengagement. The Quartet's recent decision to extend the Special Envoy mission through March 2006 and the President's recent nomination of Major General Keith Dayton to serve as our new Security Coordinator in the region highlight our continued commitment in that regard.

All parties have obligations that they must fulfil in order to achieve the objective of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. While the United States shares concerns about the hardships facing the Palestinian people, the draft resolutions that the General Assembly will consider today and tomorrow reflect neither the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict nor the need for both parties to take steps to advance the goal of peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

The General Assembly is being asked to view events in the region through the distorted lens of one-sided perceptions. Endorsing draft resolutions that condemn Israeli actions but fail to address Palestinian actions or inaction has real consequences. One-sided draft resolutions such as the ones before us today undermine the ability of the United Nations to play a constructive role in furthering peace.

Specifically, in the view of the United States, the 1975 mandate establishing the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the 1977 mandate establishing the Division for Palestinian Rights within the Secretariat perpetuate a skewed and biased approach to the Middle East conflict. Those bodies reflect a cold-war era gone by and have long since outlived whatever usefulness they may once have had. Member States should eliminate those bodies and seek ways to reinvigorate the United Nations as an even-handed partner in seeking peace between the Israelis and Palestinians, committed to the road map and to the realization of the two-State vision.

During this sixtieth session of the General Assembly, as the United Nations considers historic steps to reform itself and its institutions to better face the challenges of a new century, it must examine old mandates such as these with a critical eye and confront the reality that the time for such bodies has passed.

The United States would welcome a draft resolution that reflected a balanced and pragmatic approach consistent with that of the Quartet. Unfortunately, it appears that we will be considering texts that put the General Assembly in the position of attempting to prejudge and prejudice the settlement of final status issues. To achieve a just and lasting peace, those issues must be decided through negotiations between the parties themselves, consistent with their past agreements and with the relevant Security Council resolutions. Therefore, we will not support these unbalanced draft resolutions, which do nothing to further the cause of peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and we urge other Member States to withhold their support as well.

Mr. Sallam (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People confirms reports of the perpetration by the Israeli occupying Power of inhumane acts against the Palestinian people and the tragic situation of the Palestinian people, trapped in their own territory and suffering all types of repression, including acts of violence and assassinations.

After 38 years, the Israeli occupation continues to bear down on the Palestinian people. Their standard of living continues to deteriorate, as does their security, economic and social situation, because of Israeli

policies and practices that violate international and customary humanitarian law.

Despite all the international efforts deployed by the Quartet, which led to the road map as a means of settling the conflict by providing a timetable for the granting to the Palestinian people of their legitimate political rights, Israel continues obdurately to refuse to yield and to reject one initiative after the other. It has refused to resume negotiations, and it continues to erect obstacles and to create new realities on the ground in order to prevent the resumption of negotiations, showing a great indifference to the continuing cycle of violence, tension and instability in the region.

The policies and arbitrary actions carried out by the Israeli Government will not bring security to the Israeli people; to the contrary, they only increase the level of violence and suffering for the victims, threatening stability in the region while dispelling any hope for peace. Security cannot be achieved by confiscating land, denying rights, murdering neighbours, demolishing houses and destroying crops and farm lands, thereby making people hungry and preventing them from earning a living. Security cannot by achieved by arrogantly announcing lists of Palestinian political activists whom the Israeli Government intends to assassinate or by defying the hundreds of United Nations decisions concerning Israel's practices and activities, its flouting of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, its contempt for international resolutions on Jerusalem and its refusal to recognize resolutions concerning the deportation of civilians and the protection of Palestinian rights and people.

The path towards the settlement of international disputes can be found only by complying with the resolutions and principles of international legality. That is the only way to reduce tension and to prevent frustration and despair from reaching the boiling point as a result of occupation, injustice and aggression. We must work together to find a comprehensive and just solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Therefore, we must mobilize all our efforts to lend renewed impetus to the peace process in the Middle East, which has been stagnant for so long because of the double standards and selectivity that gave rise to continued violations of international resolutions and principles.

Saudi Arabia reaffirms its full support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to recover all its legitimate political rights. We call upon Israel to honour its commitments and to abide by Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), together with all other relevant international resolutions concerning the Palestinian question. These include the principle of land for peace, the Arab peace initiative, bilateral agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and the road map with all its provisions. Furthermore, we call upon Israel to stop tormenting the Palestinian people, to stop building the separation wall and to release Palestinian detainees.

Saudi Arabia believes that Israel's pullout from Gaza is a first step that should be followed by additional steps, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, in order to pave the way for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on Palestinian territory with East Jerusalem as its capital. We call for the resumption of the peace process so that Israel can withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the 4 June 1967 borders and from other occupied Arab territories in southern Lebanon with a view to a negotiated and comprehensive solution aimed at establishing a lasting, just and comprehensive peace in the region, which can lead to a Middle East free from weapons of mass destruction.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker on the list for agenda item 15 at this meeting. One delegation has asked to speak in right of reply.

I now give the floor to the observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): My delegation did not intend to take the floor again after the statement of our Minister for Foreign Affairs. However, we found ourselves in a position to respond to some of the comments made by a delegation that asked for the elimination of two important Committees established through General Assembly resolutions. That delegation also asked the Assembly to re-examine the mandate of those two Committees.

We believe that, on the basis of democracy and acceptance of the will of the Member States of the General Assembly, programmes related to Palestine are evaluated in a democratic manner by the entire membership of the General Assembly. It has been the will of the overwhelming majority of the Assembly to decide every year to extend the mandates of those

important Committees and programmes until a just solution to the question of Palestine can be found on the basis of the will of the international community.

Furthermore, we were surprised to hear a statement suggesting that a General Assembly resolution prejudged the settlement in the Middle East. So is it that Assembly resolutions reflecting international law and reiterating principles of international law prejudge the settlement, while illegal settlements on the ground, illegal construction of the wall and the illegal actions carried out by the Israeli occupying Power in suppressing the Palestinian people and in committing oppressive and abhorrent violations of the rights of the Palestinian people do not prejudge the settlement? We leave it up to all countries and their delegations to make a true and accurate determination as to what is really correct, what is fair, what is one-sided and what is balanced.

I wish to conclude by referring to two other issues. First, the position of the delegation to which I just referred is, frankly speaking, extremely political. It is a traditional position that shields Israel from the wall of all the relevant decisions of the international community and from international law. That position, shielding the wrong thing — the illegal acts that Israel is committing — is what allows Israel to continue its intransigence in refusing to fulfil its Charter obligations and to implement all those resolutions.

Secondly, the statement and the position of that delegation are, frankly speaking, anti-Palestinian. We have been very positive in our attitude towards establishing a relationship and carrying out dialogue and meetings in good faith with that specific country, in the spirit of implementing United Nations and Security Council resolutions and the mandate of the Quartet. But I find that statement — which I cannot describe in any other way than as anti-Palestinian — very unfortunate, especially as we are extending our hand in a positive way to that country in order to establish a very positive relationship and so that that country can take a balanced and fair position with regard to the conflict. As we have heard it expressed this evening, we find that anti-Palestinian position very unfortunate. We hope that country will reconsider its position in future interventions.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 37 for this meeting.

Programme of work

I should like to remind members that the General Assembly will continue consideration of agenda item 17, "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security", and sub-item (e) of agenda item 73, "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan", tomorrow morning at 10 a.m., as the first item. As members will recall there were speakers still remaining on the list at this morning's debate.

The Assembly will also resume its consideration of agenda item 41, "Report of the Economic and Social Council", to take action on draft resolutions A/60/L.21 and A/60/L.24. After that, we will continue debate on agenda item 15.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.